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ABSTRACT

A distinction should be made between specific teaching methods (and their improvement) and the more global concept of teacher roles. There are important questions to be answered about how teachers view both the teaching learning process and their contribution to it, as well as how students contribute to this same process. Two men have developed separate models of university teaching. Joseph Axelrod empirically distinguishes five prototypes that appear to underlie teaching performance. Richard Mann has sought to provide an understanding of the internal workings of the classroom, and focuses on the responses of various student types to different teacher roles. It seems unlikely and even undesirable that there be one best role, model, or teaching style. It is necessary to explore the methods, skills, and strategies appropriate to each role or prototype. In addition, the profession needs to help teachers improve their ability to solve the problem of reacting to a changing and developing classroom situation. (Author/MSE)

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WHAT IS A PROFESSOR?

by

George L. Geis and Ronald A. Smith

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH INTO TEACHING ROLES

During the past decade many large-scale efforts have been made to evaluate and improve the quality of university teaching. Instructional improvement/faculty development centres now offer a wide variety of services: seminars, workshops and consultations on topics as diverse as lecturing and discussion techniques, course design, interpersonal skills, goal setting, and conflict management - all of which are based on different conceptions of what is needed to improve teaching and learning. Efforts to design comprehensive systems for the assessment and improvement of teaching have followed the development of countless student evaluation questionnaires. In order to increase the impact and effectiveness of these efforts, and in order to develop alternate and perhaps more appropriate improvement strategies, it seems essential for researchers to have a better understanding of how faculty members actually see their roles as teachers. Fair and accurate assessments of teaching, as well as successful improvement efforts, must be based on an awareness of the underlying "models" that inspire individual teaching performances. A distinction should be made, though, between specific teaching methods and the more "global" concept of teacher roles. In other words, there are important questions to be answered about how teachers view both the teaching-learning process and their contribution to it, as well as how students contribute to this same process.

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This article is based in part upon the excellent summary of the relevant literature by Berquist and Phillips[1].

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what they regard as significant in determining their teaching behaviour, and how these factors relate to the instructional improvement services that they consider appropriate or useful.

In this newsletter, we report briefly on the work of two men who have developed models of university teaching.

Joseph Axelrod[2] empirically distinguishes four or five different prototypes that appear to underlie teaching performance. He describes these prototypes, in the teachers' words, as "mental images of the style I believe is most effective," or as "the portrait I believe I resemble most closely on those particular occasions when I feel happiest about my classes, when I am convinced I have achieved my greatest success in the art of teaching" (p. 9). These prototypes are the teacher's images of his performance at its best. They represent ideals or espoused theories and may be quite different from what a professor actually <u>does</u> in the classroom. In other words, the ideal or theory may not be put into practice. This kind of problem may arise either because the prototype is not completely clear in the professor's mind or because he lacks some of the skills needed to implement it faithfully.

Richard Mann[3] has developed an alternative classification of teaching performance. He sought to distinguish between the various aspects of the teacher's total relationship to his class. His categories are descriptions of the different roles a teacher might play in the classroom. As noted earlier, these roles should be distinguished from teaching method or the content of a course. The particular method used (lectures, for example) and the content of a course are different from his or her role, function, and teaching purpose. It should be noted, though, that there may be important connections between teaching methods and teaching roles.

AXELROD'S CATEGORIES

Axelrod's prototypes were developed as part of his research at Berkeley's Center for Research and Development in Higher Education. His classifications are based on in-depth interviews with (and classroom observations of) sixty professors from six campuses. One of Axelrod's goals was to develop an "aesthetics" of teaching. He looked at some of the traditional conceptions of the teacher's role: teacher as a "midwife" who helped student give birth to ideas; teacher as a "Jehovah" who breathed life into the "clods" placed before him! or teacher as a "horticultural artist" who "sowed seeds" in the minds of students. However, these traditional conceptions of the teacher did not substantially contribute to Axelrod's "aesthetics of teaching." So he decided to take a more empirical approach and went to visit these academic "artists" to see them at work (p. 7).

Two broad categories of teaching emerged: the "didactic" and the "evocative". With the didactic mode, "inquiry on the part of the student was not required for successful completion of the learning task set by the teacher" (p. 9). The student is required to master a specific body of facts or acquire specific skills. Facts are retained and skills are mastered by means of repetition and practice. The excellence of the teacher is that of a "craftsman". In the evocative mode, inquiry and discovery are the major means for demonstrating learning. The excellence of the teacher is that of the "artist".

Within the evocative mode, Axelrod could distinguish major prototypes on the basis of answers to questions he asked professors. Topics covered included: the professor's conception of his ideal student and how students change; the relationship between cognitive and affective goals (i.e. the relationship between student knowledge and student attitudes); the concept of knowledge as an activity or a "set of products which emerge from that activity"; the place given to non-verbal and intuitive activity; and several questions relating to the characteristics of classroom practice. The major difference between types is in the relative emphasis placed on either the teacher, or the learner or the subject matter. Axelrod's descriptions of the prototypes (p. 17-37) are summarized as follows:

<u>Principle and facts prototype</u>: This is the most common prototype and is

characterized by the phrase, "I teach what I know." Teaching is "organized around a desire to help students master principles, concepts, analytic tools, theories, applications and relevant facts." Emphasis is placed on cognitive knowledge and the systematic coverage of a specific segment in each course. This "subject-matter-centred" teacher is clear about how the material should be divided and ordered. He or she would expect similar courses across the country to be pretty much the same. Any alteration of the subject matter would be regarded as detrimental to academic standards, to the student, and to society in general.

According to teachers who follow this model, the goal of the student is to acquire (by being led to or given) existing material that has been accepted by workers in the field. The "ideal" student has mastered the subject matter presented and can restate it in a way the professor considers relevant and appropriate. The class atmosphere is one of scholarly objectivity and non-involvement. The professor takes a cool, rational approach. He minimizes the importance of personal opinion, and is concerned with the intellectual side of academic development.

Instructor-centred prototype: This next most common prototype can be characterized by the words, "I teach what I am." This type of professor sees himself as a possessor of knowledge and a model for the learners. His individuality and essential humanity must not be lost in the teaching process. He transmits cognitive knowledge - ever changing and alive - and uses his personality and point of view to give shape to that knowledge. He is a model of the liberally educated man. The centre of the classroom activity is what he does with the subject matter. Students should demonstrate that they can imitate the professor's ways of conceiving, defining and formulating problems, and handling data. The students' ideas are important but only to the extent that they highlight the professor's own conceptions or those of people the professor admires.

Students become educated by imitating educated people. Each professor, however, has a unique perspective and each will surely provide students with a very different experience even in courses on the same subject. It is assumed that this is how education should be.

Student-centred prototype: This is the least common prototype and could be characterized by the words, "I teach students" (this will be refined later). Professors of this kind would argue that the raison d'être for themselves and their classes is to meet student needs as growing human beings. These teachers claim that we will not be very effective if we require the student to fit some specific mold before we start. Axelrod notes that the term "student-centred" has many different meanings but he suggests that "three layers generally encompass all the others. The term (a) emphasizes the student rather than the subject matter in the learning process, (b) puts the student rather than the instructor at the centre of the class, and (c) sees the individual student and teachers as constituents of a larger and powerful organism, the total teaching learning group" (p. 41). The student-centred prototype is refined in terms of two sub-categories:

Student-as-mind prototype: This type of professor would say "I train minds." His focus is on the personal development of the student but he limits his scope to the student's mind: skills and abilities that are intellectual in nature. "Reason and language are the major tools and problem solving is the major means of investigating subject matter." The professor's goal is to motivate students to work intensely enough to master one intellectual framework and to be able to use it with ease. Analytic ability in students is cultivated, prized and encouraged.

The focus in the class is on the nature of rational activity itself, in addition to providing students with a basis for developing these fundamental abilities within themselves.

Student-as-person prototype: This sort of professor "works with students as people." He focuses on the entire personality of the student. He works on any dimension where growth might appear necessary. His major techniques involve the peer group, which provides pressure, opinion and motivation for students.

The teacher is also a member of the group and therefore subject to its pressures. His theory of human development (as well as his teaching philosophy) suggests that intellectual development cannot be separated from other aspects of personality - the goal is to help develop a "wholeness" within individuals.

The subject matter taught should help students "grow" as people. Hence, the subject matter should become a natural part of their lives. The goal is to urge students to expand and to develop new resources: to learn about both themselves and the world. During the class sessions, the professor stays relatively quiet, serving as a "resource person" and "traffic manager".

MANN'S CATEGORIES

Mann's study sought to provide an understanding of the internal workings of the classroom. It focused on interpersonal and emotional interactions within the class - particularly the responses of various student types to different teacher roles. His "typology" of different teacher roles served as a framework to study classroom interaction. Axelrod's analysis suggests that professors have a single model which inspires their performance. Mann's typology, however, describes six different roles the teacher may play and suggests that every professor determines for himself the emphasis and relative importance of each role. In fact teachers often assume each of the roles for different students during a course, and maybe even during a single class. The difference between individual professors lies in the unique weighting they attach to each role. Mann's typology attempts to answer the questions: "Who is the teacher?" and, "In what capacity does he stand before the class?"

Berquist (p. 10) has summarized Mann's more detailed descriptions as follows:

The teacher as expert: This aspect of the teacher role highlights the disparity between teacher and student in terms of the knowledge acquired, and the wisdom they each apply to the subject matter of the course. The teacher is the expert, at least within certain defined areas of knowledge. His expertise gives him his right to be there in the teaching capacity and it is also the main reason for student interest in taking the course.

The teacher as formal authority: Viewed from the perspective of the larger social structure within which the classroom is located, the teacher is an agent, not only of instruction, but also of control and evaluation. He is responsible to a group of administrators and external agents. When performing this role, the professor is expected to present a set of final grades that insures uniformity of standards. The evaluation system used should be justifiable on the basis of relative student merit.

The teacher as socializing agent: The students' goals typically reach far beyond a particular classroom or course. The teacher is usually a member of the community of scholars, accredited by a professional or academic discipline. He is also a member of an institution that may be highly relevant to a student's occupational aspirations. The teacher resembles in some sense a "gatekeeper" to a vocational world. He serves as a representative of his field, and especially of the values, assumptions, and style of intellectual life that characterize his discipline. Frequently, it is he who does not pass a student to the next plateau or screening process or, alternatively, he may do so with varying degrees of support and pleasure.

The teacher as facilitator: There are times in the teacher-student relationship when the teacher seems much less absorbed with his own expertise, his power, and his field than with the aspirations of the students.... By not assuming that he can specify what skills or goals students bring with them, he creates for himself the complex task of determining what individual students have come to do, what they seem able to do already, and what they might need help in doing better.... From this it follows that the typical activities of the teacher as "facilitator" may entail far more listening and questioning than lecturing and assigning.

The teacher as ego ideal: [Students] use their teacher in the continuous process of formulating and approaching their ideals. It may only be some of the students some of the time, and the idealization may be limited to certain aspects of the teacher's total performance, but this process is an important part of the college classroom.

The teacher as "person": The teacher as a "person" aims at engaging students in a mutually validating relationship. Ideally, both the student and teacher feel sufficient trust and freedom to share their ideas and their personal reactions not only to the course material, but also to matters that may fall outside the usual definition of what is relevant in a classroom.

THE SELECTION OF TEACHING ROLES

In practice, the particular prototype a professor represents, or the emphasis he places on the various teaching roles, is a complex function involving both his past history and his present environment. The university milieu affects what the teacher does and thinks he should be doing. The campus ethos, colleague expectations, department norms, student demands, employer requests, and government directives all play a part in the teacher's formulation of his teaching role. In addition, a professor's choice of role is influenced by the various models of teaching that are available, his need to feel competent and comfortable in a role, as well as his philosophy of education and theory of learning. Other important variables include the specific nature of the subject matter, the course goals and objectives, and the competing priorities of research and administration.

Is there one best role, model, or style? It seems unlikely, even undesirable. From this short summary, it is clear that the task of describing how teachers actually see teaching is a very complex one and that the effectiveness of any particular role depends on many variables according to the particular teaching situation. Mann (using a concept developed by Bion) suggests an integration of these disparate roles can be achieved if we define the goal of classroom activities as work - "the process of doing what needs to be done, that is, of addressing, in the proper balance for the moment, the demands of the group's formal task and the demands of the individual group members that stem from their developing relationships with one another" (p. 17). Some of the current research in leadership and management supports this view of "work" - for example, Hersey and Blanchard's[4] study of situational leadership.

Teachers on any campus, and probably within any given department, have very different views of what teaching is, or what it should be. It is naive and counter-productive to expect these differences to disappear. Each is necessary, appropriate, and effective in certain situations in a course or class. What, then, is the role of instructional improvement centres? It is necessary to explore the methods, skills, and strategies appropriate to each teaching role or prototype. Teaching will become more effective as teachers themselves become more able to distinguish between the various teaching roles, the strengths and limitations of those roles, and differing student roles and needs. In addition, we need to help professors in improving not only their teaching skills, but also their ability to solve the problem of reacting to a changing and developing classroom situation. The first step seems to be to find out, to use a contemporary colloquialism, "where the professor is at." Our research is being undertaken for this purpose.

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